

# OPUNTIA

## 61.1

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Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Chester Cuthbert  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

2006-04-14

Re: comments about the 1929 market crash. You do not mention the books by Paul E. Erdman, a banker who wrote the following books: THE CRASH OF '79, THE LAST DAYS OF AMERICA, THE PANIC OF '89, and THE BILLION DOLLAR SURE THING. When he wrote, the great fear was that the value of paper money would vanish and he recommended commodities.

[I thought at one time of reviewing books by him and others who predict every five years that there will be another crash like the Great Depression. I read through a few of them, and although the titles and blurbs predicted economic Armageddon, the text always contained enough qualifiers and modifiers to allow wiggle room to explain why we never had crashes in 1979 and 1989. Interestingly though, none of these authors predicted the panic of 1987 or the dot.com bust.]

I invested in silver bullion and silver certificates as a hedge against inflation. Although these investments paid me nothing in income, the current price of silver has made the investment

worthwhile. The value of our home is another instance that commodities are safer than bonds as real value. I bought some Canada Savings Bonds for current income, but they were no good against inflation. Our only stock investment is in a company which is invested in real estate and power generation, necessities which have value regardless of money panics.

[The problem with a house for an investment is that you can't liquidate it at a profit unless you are moving someplace cheaper, since you still need a place to live. In Calgary, house prices are increasing in price at \$500 per day, and it appears that Calgary houses will become more expensive than Toronto in the near future. My property tax assessment went from \$238,000 to \$281,000 this year, and I suspect it will be \$350,000 next year. My brother and I co-own a holding company which invests in bonds for income, but we have our own private investments for our pensions. I have been putting some of my oil royalty income into a natural gas exploration company. Oil is a global commodity and too subject to the whims of elsewhere, but natural gas is a regional commodity and scarce in North America. It is too late to invest in bullion since the major gains have already been made, gold going from \$250 in 1999 to \$700 in early 2006. I vividly remember the long lineups at banks in 1981 of people buying gold at \$850 just before the market collapsed. No doubt the same foolishness will repeat itself in the near future, as with all those who bought dot.com stock at the top of the market.]

You said that the 1929 Crash was due to easy credit. Today the average family owes more than an entire year's income, which seems to me to indicate that another bad recession or depression is inevitable.

[My debt load is zero, precisely because I remember what happened when the last oil boom crashed in 1982, which I barely survived. I think Alberta will have a few years of boom yet, but have no doubt that eventually it will all end in tears.]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas

2006-04-03

15 Jansons Road

Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England

[Re: e-zines published as 8.5 x 11 double-column instead of being formatted for the screen] There has in fact been at least one other e-zine which was published in landscape rather than portrait format, so that it could be read on screen without scrolling back and forth. This was the late John Foyster's eFNAC, which is archived at [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) (and which you included in your list).

[Since I first discussed the subject, Chris Garcia began publishing some of his e-zines in landscape format, so that they can be easily read one page at a time and no scrolling required.]

Even pdfs are unsatisfactory when talking of e-zines. The whole point of a pdf is to preserve a document's original formatting, so that when printed out it will look exactly like the original. But if the zine is truly "e", then exactly what original document is being preserved? None at all, so it strikes me as simply daft to take a block of text intended primarily for publication on the Web and then insert column breaks and whatnot to make it look like something else. Far better and easier to have the text run as a single column down the centre of the screen. If it needs to be broken up because it's a magazine with two or more articles, then give each article a Web page of its own and link them from a contents page at the front.

[Which, of course, makes it a Web site, and not an e-zine. I think this is why e-zines will only be a transitional format and will fade away as the Internet continues to evolve.]

FROM: Ned Brooks  
4817 Dean Lane  
Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720

2006-03-29

I agree that forcing the formatting from double-column standard page layout onto the screen, so that the user has to scroll up and down to read the columns, is an annoyance. At one time there were vertical page-shape screens made for special purposes, but

this was apparently found impractical for the Internet. With the new lightweight screens and a little cyber voodoo however, it should be possible to use a screen with the long dimension either horizontal or vertical.

[I've seen some specialty vertical screens, and have always wondered why personal computers got sidetracked into horizontal screens. I think that this is a moot point because new flat screens are coming onto the market that are so big that they can display pages vertically without re-formatting. Where I work, I recently had a tour of our new call centre, and saw the operators using flat screens large enough to display two 8.5 x 11 pages side by side at full size.]

We remember the great paper zines, but I suspect that the vapidness level in e-zines is overall only a little worse than the average from when everyone had to publish on paper. There is the ease of use factor; you had to *want* to do a paper zine a bit more, what with typing, printing, and mailing, as compared to just adding verbiage to a Web site.

**I ALSO HEARD FROM:** Julie Jefferies, John Held Jr, Joel Cohen, Dewitt Young, Kris Mininger, Terry Jeeves, Ficus, KRin Pender-Gunn, Bridget Bradshaw



## CRIME AND PUBLISHPMENT

by Dale Speirs

One of my sideline book collections is mystery stories set in the publishing milieu. Crime and publishing go together, as any author can tell you who has been stiffed on his royalty payments, and as any editor can tell you who has been stiffed by an author late with his manuscript or throwing a prima donna hissy fit.

### Plagiarism.

The greatest sin an author can commit is plagiarism. The scribes who get sent up for murder or defalcation can be forgiven, and income tax trouble is something we all can relate to, but it is unpardonable to pass off someone else's words as your own.

Rex Stout dealt with a particularly severe case of plagiarism in the 1959 novel **Plot It Yourself**. This is a Nero Wolfe detection, done by the mountain of a man who prefers to solve his cases without stirring from his Manhattan brownstone, relying on his assistant Archie Goodwin to do the footwork (and to narrate the story). This novel, set in the middle 1950s, starts off with a delegation from a group of publishers and authors who have been hit by several plagiarism cases in the past few years. These cases are of a kind; an author publishes a bestseller, and a few months later is sued by an unknown who claims to have sent the exact

same manuscript for review a couple of years previous.

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In each case, the original typescript of the plaintiff is discovered in the publisher's file cabinets or the author's house, forcing an expensive out-of-court settlement. The typescripts have obviously been planted after the novels were published, but because the cases involved different publishing houses, no one had any reason to compare the typewriters used or the literary style of the story. But after the fourth time, people got suspicious, questions were asked, and a delegation waited on Wolfe for help.

Like so many hard-boiled detective stories, Goodwin keeps crossing swords with the NYPD, particularly as in this case he always seems to arrive at a suspect's apartment five minutes after the Homicide Squad. In the real world, private eyes who always seemed to be on the site of a murder would quickly lose their licences. (Just as any Miss Marples whose village had a murder rate like a waterfront slum would soon be the #1 suspect.) Wolfe novels finish off with the great man calling in all the suspects and deducing who did the murder from conversational analysis. This one is no different. And, as often the case, the fateful clue is supposedly given several dozen pages prior, so the reader can guess, but because so many clues are strewn about, it is usually impossible to guess which one was the significant one. A single Nero Wolfe story by itself is not so bad, but because Stout used the same formula for all of them, there is a monotonous sameness if you read too many at once.

Josephine Bell's 1978 novel **Treachery In Type** starts off with the widow Mrs. Grosshouse, living quietly in the English countryside of Devon. She was once the best-selling novelist Anita Armstrong, long, long ago. Her dwindling pension and creeping inflation have forced her to re-start her writing career in the hopes that a new novel can stave off elderly starvation. She hires a typist named Judy Smith to transcribe her longhand manuscript. The novel is promising not only to Grosshouse's publisher but to the ne'er-do-well Judy and her equally shifty boyfriend Chris. Judy is unaware of Grosshouse's past and thinks she is just a dotty old lady filling in the empty days with busy work that will never be published. Judy makes a second copy of the manuscript and peddles it as her own work to another publisher. She changes the title for obvious reasons, and does a slight re-write to spice up the book.

Grosshouse goes off to Italy for an extended stay, both books are published, and not long after the plagiarism is found out. Matters are complicated when Chris' body is found floating in the river, and Judy begins to suffer a string of suspicious near-miss accidents. Judy decides to take her ill-gotten gains and run for the continent via her sailboat. A storm wrecks the boat on a sandbar just before it blows up. Someone had planted a bomb in the bilges, expecting it to sink her in the middle of the English Channel without a trace. But Judy survives the wreck, and it is discovered that her publisher is a drug trafficker who sent out his

commodity inside his books. Judy makes a second run for it and succeeds, disappearing into South America. Mrs. Grosshouse is vindicated and savors the royalties on two books. It turns out that Judy's version is actually the more popular.

**Treachery In Type** is a melange of styles. It starts off as Miss Marple type of story, adds in a police procedural as Scotland Yard investigates Chris' death, and switches to a seafaring story before hastily wrapping up loose ends. There is one coincidence that was obviously the author trying to write herself out of a tight spot. On the whole, an average mystery novel but readable enough.

Tom Sharpe wrote a ribald comedy **The Throwback** in 1978 which uses a variation of **Treachery In Type** as a subplot. The main action revolves around an elderly miser out on the moors of northern England whose wayward daughter died in childbirth without telling him who her son's father was. The boy was named Lockhart because his mother, in her dying moments, kept shouting "Great Scot!" at the pain. He raised the lad into a strapping big lunk and eventually gets him married off to a young woman named Jessica. She has inherited property which unfortunately is rent-controlled at a low rate, so to earn a bit of money, goes to work for hack authoress Miss Magster, alias Genevieve Goldring and a variety of other names.

Magster churns out romance novels when she is sober, and when she can find a secretary to take dictation, she not being the best at human relations.

Jessica and Lockhart hatch a plot, or subplot rather, for Jessica to type up two copies of the manuscript. One is the novel Magster is dictating. The other, written by Jessica and Lockhart, is a libelous version almost identical except that two of the characters are named Jessica and Lockhart, described with the same physical characteristics as the real ones, but given perverted behaviour that should be, and is, worth a million pounds sterling in the subsequent court case. Magster churns out novels so fast that she sells the first drafts without reading them. Jessica sends in the plagiarized version with the libels. The publisher accepts the book, it is released and sells for a few weeks. Jessica and Lockhart wait long enough for it to hit the bestseller list, and then Magster is undone in court for libel.

Sharpe's literary style can best be described as raucous. His humour is violent and often scatological, but if you know what you are about to read, not too disgusting.

### **And The Winner Is ...**

On the topic of literary prize-giving is **Carnage On The Committee** by Ruth Dudley Edwards (2004), which details the

vicious in-fighting of the judges for the Knapper-Warburton Literary Prize. The prize is £100,000 and well worth killing for, as indeed is exactly what happens when the Chairwoman of the committee unknowingly takes ricin with her salad.

The book spends about two-thirds of its pages detailing the behaviour of the judges, as they snipe and argue with each other about titles for the prize short list. The prize, like others of its nature, is to be awarded for literary merit, and, like others of its nature, is actually awarded for political correctness and adherence to the latest literary fads. To the surviving judges, the murder is mostly a minor detail; few liked the deceased's taste in literature anyway.

The book is slow to develop, spending much time building up the characters, but as the final chapters near, it speeds up the pace. Three more judges are abruptly edited out of this life and into the slush pile of the next world. The denouement was a cheat. SPOILER ALERT: A butler who had a walk-on role in the early part of the book and was given an impeccable character, is suddenly revealed to have a complex past and a motive, all of that given in an infodump in the last few pages. Yes, the butler did it.

As I closed the book, I got the impression that Edwards had spent so much time on the literary infighting that she forgot to look at



the clock and suddenly had to wrap it up. The ending was rushed and had too many twists and turns. Worst of all, it cheated the reader by introducing information at the last minute instead of giving a fair chance to spot the murderer by distributing clues throughout the book. Worse yet, the new data contradicted what had previously been asserted. Conclusion: readable but not a fair mystery story.

**The Roaring Queen** by Wyndham Lewis was originally accepted by his publishers in 1936. It is a thinly disguised satire on the English literary circle of that day. Had it been published then, it would have caused a literary sensation, but the publisher got cold feet, fearing libel actions. The book did not appear until 1973, and then only from an American publisher.

The novel is about a weekend party at a manor house. The lady of the house is an American heiress, her husband the titled gent, and the guests a quarrelsome mixture of writers and critics. The bickering and politicking revolve mostly around the various literary prizes up for grabs, the main one of which is Book of the Week. Mentioned in passing is the Diploma for the Year's Cleverest Literary Larceny, for bare-faced plagiarism. The judge and jury of that award is Mrs. Rhoda Hyman, a thinly disguised Virginia Woolf. Table talk about that award reveals she is just as well qualified to win it as anyone else who cuts and pastes. Some of the characters also brag of their literary larcenies.

The novel finishes off by finishing off the leading contender for the Book of the Week prize. The guests depart as the constabulary arrive, and the murder is not only ignored but is positively anticlimactic. The fun of this novel was in the bickering conversations of the writers and guests. I say 'was', since one would have to have a PhD in post-WW1 literary history to understand the people and circumstances being spoofed. Topical satire is funniest when freshest, and fails completely for the next generation.

### **The Gentle Business Of Publishing.**

**The Belles Lettres Papers** by Charles Simmons is a 1987 short novel. It is a literary satire about a New York City publishing company, spoiled somewhat by the heavy-handed names of the characters, such as Samuel Serif, Skippy Overleaf, Virginia Wrappers, Art Folio, and Bobby Quarto. BELLES LETTRES is a literary small-press magazine. The novel starts off with a brief history of it, a send-up that exactly summarizes the histories of most commercial small-press magazines aspiring to be the next NEW YORKER, from a founder who subsidized its losses to a Doubleday-style second owner.

In the time of the narrator of this novel, the magazine has settled down into a book review weekly. The process of choosing books for review, and who to review it,

is decided in editorial committee meetings that remind one of Bismark's adage that if you enjoy either the law or sausage, don't watch either being made. As the editor of BELLES LETTRES tells the narrator: *"You see a magazine in terms of its editorial content. But a magazine is a vehicle that advertisers rent. Our editorial content could be changed in a month if the advertisers and readers wanted it. Along with the content, of course, would go the editors."*

This novel is a fix-up novel; many of the chapters were originally published as separate stand-alone short stories. The episodes are about life at the magazine, whose staff seem to operate by instinct on the shady side. A clerk gets nailed not only for selling surplus unwanted review copies for his own personal account, but also for selling places on the bestsellers list (\$5,000 for a publisher to move a title one place up the list). The chief editor keeps picking the wrong sort of staff women to romance and only avoids sexual harassment charges because the women aren't any better than him at ethics. The owner's wife tells the editor to publish a list of the best 25 living American writers. Allen Ginsberg is selected as #1; the editors took 25 names in alphabetical order and then randomized them to create the final ranking.

The publisher appoints a new editor who operates in the Murdoch style and decides to start off by firing the older, more expensive staff: *"Let's take his fifty grand and spread it between two Vassar*

*girls."* (Standard practice in today's publishing industry; **-8-** another requirement is that the girls must have triple-barreled names.) This touches off a round of vicious office politics. It ends with the pseudo-Murdoch being taken in by a newly-discovered Shakespeare sonnet he ordered published, which turns out to be a hoax set up by angry staffers.

Charles Simmons wrote this book based on his experiences in the New York publishing industry. The novel certainly seems true to life and is a pleasant read. One could actually convert it into an extended DILBERT cartoon strip series, as the office politics will be quite recognizable to anyone.

Ruth Dudley Edwards brings murder to another magazine office in **Publish And Be Murdered** (1998). It is set in London, at THE WRANGLER, a 200-year-old right-wing journal still regretting Catholic Emancipation and universal suffrage. The proprietor brings in a new manager to improve the business side of the operation, such as replacing the 1960s typewriters with word processors. The editor is slowly shifting the editorial policy from landed Tory towards New Labour (not such a great shift, some might argue), which makes him even more unpopular with his staff, who already despise him for his personal behaviour. A boorish Australian billionaire (female, so she can't be Murdoch) is bidding to buy the magazine and upscale it with downsized staff. Surprisingly, the editor is the second murder victim; the



first is a staff writer who seems to have been drowned in a punch bowl (he was a heavy drinker) for no apparent reason.

This book is part of a series of murder mysteries, so it is somewhat abrupt in the details, as if the author expected all the readers to know the previous background. Although it is reasonably self-contained, some of the characterizations were obviously fleshed out in other stories, leaving the new reader to guess why the characters behave as they do. The ending is a cheat. The proprietor, who was healthy enough to sneak up a fire escape and set a tripwire, is suddenly revealed to be dying of cancer, and makes a deathbed confession. The clues scattered about the book are not only redundant but useless.

### **The Gentle Art Of Libel.**

**End Of Chapter** is a 1957 novel by Nicholas Blake set in the era of England's post-war decline. The lead character is Nigel Strangeways, hired by a respectable London publisher to investigate how one of their books had been published with libelous paragraphs in them. Those paragraphs had been marked for deletion on the proofs, but someone intercepted them en route to the printers and wrote 'stet' on them. ('stet' is a proofreading term meaning "let it stand", telling the printer to leave in text that had previously been marked for deletion or amendment.)

As a consequence of the paragraphs appearing in the book, the publisher is being sued big time. Everyone at the publishing house is a suspect because all had the opportunity to change the proofs, so the investigation must concentrate on motive. This isn't much help, since everyone has also has a past, and, in some cases, their present, to provide sufficient motive. Matters are muddled by a murder and an attempted murder which are not related to the libel.

This novel starts out as a pure mystery, where the reader is in the dark as much as Strangeways. When the first murder is committed, the book suddenly turns into a police procedural, where the reader is informed of details that Strangeways doesn't know, and the interest is in how he works out the solution. It is always an awkward fault in a novel when the author has been using third-person narrative and suddenly addresses the reader directly. Another fault is that the attempted murder of Strangeways is forestalled by an unbelievable coincidence. Other than those problems, this novel is an easy read.

### **The Not-So-Gentle Art Of Murder.**

The 1968 novel **Death Among The Stars** by Kenneth Giles is a murder mystery set in a low-class newspaper office, a London tabloid aimed at the working classes for whom the SUN is too intellectual. The staffer who writes the daily astrology column failed to foresee his own fate in the stars,

and is found seriously dead in the news room. Subsequent investigation by C.I.D. Inspector Harry James and his faithful assistant the plodding Sergeant Honeybody reveal that the dead man was a spy, and was using his column to pass information on to his Moscow superiors. In the time-honoured tradition of mystery novels, two suspects for the first murder are themselves despatched to the next world, and suspicion is thrown about like salt. It turns out that the newspaper had two spies, and the murderer is the other espionage agent, who didn't like the competition.

As a narrative, the novel plods along like Sergeant Honeybody, but its strength is in its characterization. We follow the Inspector and Sergeant on and off duty, as they bumble their way through the investigation (they missed a suspect because they stopped for a beer at the pub), their other duties (policemen never investigate just one case at a time), and their home life. The two men are obviously dear friends, the young Inspector with a newborn daughter, and the portly middle-aged Sergeant with six grown children, who gives fatherly advice to the young parents. The Inspector and the Sergeant are doing their best to keep one small section of London from slipping into savagery. The novel shows the argot and behaviour of the London police and the underworld in realistic fashion. It draws in the reader to keep turning the pages, not so much for whodunit but for the interplay of the characters.

The 1983 novel **The Bay Psalm Book Murder** by Will Harriss (the extra 's' is not an error) is about Cliff Dunbar, a California university professor whose best friend, a rare book librarian, has been murdered. The police call it a mugging gone wrong since only money was taken from his wallet. What baffles Dunbar is that the dead man was clutching a copy of what was supposed to be a genuine Bay Psalm Book, the first book printed in the USA, and worth a fortune. The book was donated to the university by a candidate for Governor of California. The question is not why the muggers ignored it; they would have no interest in a old book. But the book should not have been taken out of the library.

Suspicious are aroused, and Dunbar decides to investigate the book. He hires a pretty graduate student to proofread the library's copy and compare with a facsimile of an undoubted genuine Bay Psalm Book. It is soon discovered to be a forgery, very well done in the physical details of type and paper, but composed on the press platen by a forger who instinctively corrected the spelling mistakes in the original as he set the type.

From there, things get complicated. The politico gets nervous about the private investigation, and Mafia hit men try unsuccessfully to take out what they think is a meek professor and discover too late that he did a tour of duty in Vietnam with the

special forces. A Las Vegas don is bankrolling the candidate, but, no, he wasn't the one who ordered the original hit on the librarian. Eventually Dunbar tracks down the forger, who hadn't wanted the librarian to expose him, and even gets the Mafia to abandon both the hit contract and the candidate. He also gets the girl.

Like any Hollywood movie, there is a false climax, followed by the final denouement when shots are fired at Dunbar by a sniper. It was actually quite funny. The rifleman is the printer who forged the book, and who wears Coke-bottle-bottom glasses. He is taken out when the girl turns on the irrigation system and blinds him with a spray of water. He was still trying to wipe his glasses clean so he can take another shot and is brought down by someone snatching the wet eyeglasses out of his hand, leaving him stumbling around blind.

The book reads well but the plot is the typical private citizen outsmarting the police type of story. At times, one can see the plot coming five pages before it gets there, but there are enough flashes of wit to redeem the novel.

## OTHER BOOK REVIEWS

**Postcards: Cartoline d'Artista** (2005, trade paperback, 206 pages), edited by Vittore Baroni. (Available from him for Euro15 or US\$18 cash; send to Vittore Baroni, Via C. Battisti 339, 55049 Viareggio, Italy) This is the third volume of a history of mail art; the first two dealt with rubber stamping and artistamps. Bilingual in Italian and English, and very well produced. This volume surveys the progress of mail art postcards, with numerous illustrations. The most famous mail art postcard was the 1965 "Postman's Choice" by Ben Vautier, which had two different addressees, one on each side, and left it up to the postal sorter to decide which address to send it to. Various authors in this anthology discuss the different fads and types of mail art postcards, ranging from one-of-a-kind to mass-produced, from incoherent to political protest, and from photographic to hand-drawn. A good survey for those not familiar with this aspect of mail art.

**Entropia** (2005, hardcover, 127 pages) by Christian Lorenz Scheurer is a full-colour art book that illustrates the history of the planet Entropia and its various moons through artistamps. Each stamp tells of some aspect of Entropian history, from the monarchy to the republican coup to the direct democracy after the Czar was overthrown. The bizarre flora and fauna are shown in beautiful imagery.



## ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$3 cash (\$5 overseas), trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are acceptable around the world. SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive, a genzine is a general zine]

**Zoo Nation #7** (The Usual from Peter Young, 62 Walmer Road, Woodley, Berkshire RG5 4PN, England) A variety of interesting articles, such as why bad paintings of winged kittens sell in British SF art shows (fortunately they haven't made their way to Calgary yet), a Toynbee nut cult in Philadelphia, and reverse theft (get rid of your unwanted books by sneaking them into friend's libraries).

**FOSFAX #212** (US\$4 from Falls of the Ohio SF and Fantasy Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) 76 pages of lots of book reviews, letters of comment, political rants, and miscellaneous.

**Plokta #34** (The Usual from Alison Scott, 24 St. Mary Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9RG) Adventures in gardening, rediscovering lost music, and a response to someone who criticized a recent SF convention, as well as letters of comment.

**Musea #148 to #150** (The Usual from -12-  
Tom Hendricks, 4000 Hawthorne #5, Dallas,  
Texas 75219) #148 has a rewrite by Hendricks of the ballet COPPELIA, on the grounds that: " ... *the plot didn't make sense* ... *the characterization was thin* ... ". Actually I always thought this was the international standard for all opera and ballet. Such as, for example, Romeo coming across a sleeping Julia, automatically assuming she was dead without checking for a pulse or breathing, and committing suicide in grief. Which result, I think, was best for the Italian gene pool. #149 is the size of a CD and is a compilation of drawings by Hendricks. #150 is a daydream of what the ideal art gallery should look like.

**Anatomic Air Review #2** (The Usual from Sinoun, 2090A Highway 317 #239, Suwanee, Georgia 30024) Mini-zine with assorted comments and photos.

**Banana Wings #26** (The Usual from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croyden, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) Sercon SF zine, with comments on being an unlovable fan, Greek plays for SF conventions, there is no new thing under the sun, conventions, some past zines, and letters of comment.

**For The Clerisy #67** (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Movie and book reviews, the nomenclature of readers, and letters of comment.

**Peter Netmail Vol. 1** (No price given but I think 5 Euros or US\$5 would cover his costs. Available from Peter Netmail, P.O. Box 2644, D32383 Minden, Deutschland) This is a homemade DVD of Netmail's performance art at a variety of venues over the past couple of decades. Fortunately my new laptop plays DVDs so I was able to enjoy it. Some of the scenes are blurry or have uneven sound quality, but this is forgivable given that the video recording was done at live venues, often from the audience. Besides performances, there are also scans of television newscasts about mail art displays. One attendee interviewed was John Held Jr of San Francisco. He spoke in English but the German translation was dubbed overtop, so I have no idea what he was talking about even though he was speaking my language. The best performance was "War Dance", which involved soldiers in ballerina outfits, which has to be seen to be appreciated; very amusing! I was flattered that Netmail used my Useless Labour project as a theme for one of his performances in Belgrade. He even handed out flyers to the audience explaining about me so they could understand his performance.

**I Must Be Nuts** (The Usual from Colin Hinz, 148 Howland Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5R 3B5) A one-shot mimeographed zine on twiltone paper (that's how SF zines were done before photocopiers) from the recent Corflu SF convention in Toronto. It discusses re-discovering the now forgotten problems of mimeography, such as cleaning the ink out.

**Xerography Debt #19** (US\$3 from Davida Gypsy Breier, Box 11064, Baltimore, Maryland 21212) Reviewzine by multiple reviewers of various zines, as well as commentary and interviews about zines. And congratulations to Davida on the birth of her son. While the rest of us zinesters complain we aren't getting any new recruits, she does something practical about increasing the size of zinedom.

**The Fossil #328** (US\$15 from The Fossils, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan, Denver, Colorado 80209) Devoted to zine history, this issue having articles about the 1940s era of apazines.

**Hat #114** (The Usual from Ross Priddle, 9 Vista Road SE, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1B 4S9) Small literary zine with some poetry, visual pieces, and commentary on poetry.

**Probe #128 and #129** (The Usual from Science Fiction South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) Clubzine with strong emphasis on fiction writing, also some reviews and letters of comment.

**Statement #338 and #339** (The Usual from the Ottawa Science Fiction Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with news and notes, letters of comment, and a good selection of astronomy articles from a NRC astronomer.

**The Knarley Knews #116 and #117** (The Usual from Henry Welch, 1525 - 16 Avenue, Grafton, Wisconsin 53024-2017) Genzine, with fannish remarks, a continuing humourous series by Terry Jeeves about life in the RAF, and lots of letters of comment.

**Orga{ni}sm #2** (The Usual from Gianni Simone, 3-3-23 Nagatsuta, Midori-ku, Yokohama-shi, 226-0027 Kanagawa-ken, Japan) In English by an Italian expatriate married to a Japanese woman. Accounts by various gaijin on adapting to life in Japan.

**Tortoise #22** (The Usual from Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32-33 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1 2BQ, England) Some reminisces and history of Shrewsbury, including plans to celebrate its most famous denizen, Charles Darwin. Also letters of comment.

**Alexiad V5#2** (The Usual from Lisa and Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Lots of book reviews and letters of comments.

**Word Watchers (2006 Spring)** (The Usual from Jeanette Handling, 1905 Southview Court, Jacksonville, Illinois 62650-3525) Devoted to etymology, mostly of newly minted words or phrases, such as “evil twin” (a method of hacking wireless Internet connections) and “signalization”, as well as which variant spelling should be used for the hometown of the 2006 Winter Olympics.

**Ethel The Aardvark #123** (The Usual from Melbourne Science Fiction Club, Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia) Clubzine with news and notes, author interview, book and video reviews, and letters of comment.

**Door Knob #89 to #92** (The Usual from Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, California 94611-1948) Apazine with comments on SF fandom and other subjects.

**Warp #64** (The Usual from Montréal Science Fiction and Fantasy Association, Box 1186, Place du Parc, Montréal, Québec H2X 4A7) SF clubzine with news and notes, letters of comment, convention reports, an ongoing history of human apes in fiction, and an illustrated history of Harryhausen animation.

**File 770 #147** (US\$8 for five issues from Mike Glycer, 705 Valley View Avenue, Monrovia, California 91016) The newszine of SF fandom, with convention reports, obituaries and births, who did what to whom, and letters of comment.

**Triquetrum #2** (The Usual from Colin Hinz, 148 Howland Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5R 3B5) A checklist and commentary on older British fanzines that Hinz picked up at the freebie table at the recent Glasgow Worldcon.



**Vanamonde #633 to #637** (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Weekly single-sheet apazine with comments on a wide variety of topics.

**BCSFazine #397** (The Usual from British Columbia Science Fiction Association, Box 15335, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 5B1) SF clubzine with news and notes, and a convention report.

**Concussed** (The Usual from Keith Walker, 6 Vine Street, Greaves, Lancaster LA1 4UF, England) One-shot 8-page zine reporting about a British convention called Concussion.

**Watershed #1 and #2** (The Usual from Andy Hooper, and Carrie Root, 11032 - 30 Avenue NE, Seattle, Washington 98125) Commentary on whither fanzines?, gaming conventions, and personal notes.

## **SEEN IN THE LITERATURE**

noticed by Dale Speirs

Iyigun, M. (2006) **Clusters of invention, life cycle of technologies and endogenous growth.** JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC DYNAMICS AND CONTROL 30:687-719

*"This paper combines learning-by-doing with R&D activity that can be directed to either the discovery of new technologies (inventions) or the improvement of the quality of machines without altering their underlying technology (innovations). By doing so, it establishes that learning-by-doing is an important determinant of the relative share of resources allocated to inventive versus innovative activities. The dynamics of the model generates endogenous economic growth driven by cycles of technological change, where the pattern and timing of technological improvements are consistent with the historical evidence: (a) inventions and innovations play complementary roles in expanding the technology frontier; (b) when inventions occur they tend to arrive in clusters; and (c) all new technologies go through a life cycle, during the early stages of which a discovery is followed by a period of rapid economic growth and innovation and the late stages of which dwindling innovations and slower growth set the stage for new discoveries."*

Bade, D. (2006) **The Zheng He dilemma: Language identification and automatic indexing.** LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION 26:193-199

*“Proper names present special problems not only for theories of language but also for indexing and language identification, whether performed by human or mechanical agents, especially so when the names may also be understood otherwise than as names. The problem is compounded in the case of transliterated text and multilingual publications. If the indexer cannot understand the meaning of the text, whether name, phrase or sentence, a heuristic decision process cannot decide amongst various possibilities.”*

Speirs: In other words, translations of ambiguous or context-dependent words by computer has still far to go.

Schulze-Makuch, D., and L.N. Irwin (2006) **The prospect of alien life in exotic forms on other worlds.** NATURWISSENSCHAFTEN 93:155-172

*“The nature of life on Earth provides a singular example of carbon-based, water-borne, photosynthesis-driven biology. Within our understanding of chemistry and the physical laws governing the universe, however, lies the possibility that alien life could be based on different chemistries, solvents, and energy sources from*

*the one example provided by Terran biology.*

*In this paper, we review some of these possibilities.*

*Silanes may be used as functional analogs to carbon molecules in environments very different from Earth; solvents other than water may be compatible for life-supporting processes, especially in cold environments, and a variety of energy sources may be utilized, some of which have no Terran analog. As examples, we have pointed to the possibility of extremely acidophilic microbes residing in water droplets in the upper atmosphere of Venus and of exotic organisms using either organic solvent-based metabolism or water-based metabolism encased within a hydrocarbon environment on Titan.”*

Mastrolorenzo, G., et al (2006) **The Avellino 3780-yr-B.P. catastrophe as a worst-case scenario for a future eruption at Vesuvius.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 103:4366-4370

During the Bronze Age, 3780 years ago, Vesuvius erupted and buried everything within 25 km under a thick layer of pumice and pyroclastics. The preliminary eruptions caused the evacuation of thousands of inhabitants, so the death toll was not large. However, the cataclysm rendered a large area of Campania into a desert for centuries. Naples is within range of another such eruption.